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Children's literature: What's on the horizons

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Adler, David A. 1997. *Lou Gehrig: The luckiest man*. Illustrated by Terry Widener. San Diego: Gulliver Books/Harcourt Brace. ISBN: 0-15-200523-4. 32 pp.

This is an extraordinary biography of one of baseball's greatest heroes. The story is heartwarming and inspiring. The acrylic paintings which illustrate the story enhance the text.

Cardo, Horacio. 1998. *The story of chess*. NY: Abbeville. ISBN: 0-7892-0250-6. 45 pp.

This illustrated book offers a mythical look at the derivation of the game of chess. In so doing, it explains the pieces, the board and some of the moves. It is a compelling introduction to chess involving the complex strategies in playing the game.

Christopher, Matt. 1998. *The dog that called the pitch*. Illustrated by Daniel Vasconcellos. ISBN: 0-316-14207-7. 38 pp.

Mike and his dog, Harry can read each other's minds. Mike is going to pitch at the little league game that day and wants his dad to help him practice. As they start to warm up, along comes Mr. Grimley who is going to be the home plate umpire for the game. Mr. Grimley, it turns out, can also read Mike's and Harry's minds. In the bottom of the 8th inning, Mike accidentally bumps into Mr. Grimley whose glasses fall off and get stepped on. Harry saves the day by calling the pitches for Mr. Grimley. Much of the book reads like a play-by-play of the game complemented by the pen and ink cartoon drawings.

This early reader story is another one of Matt Christopher's well told sports stories and will be of great interest to baseball fans especially. The team is made up of both boys and girls.

Levine, Abby. 1998. *Gretchen, groundhog. It's your day!* Illustrated by Nancy Cote. Morton Grove IL: Albert Whitman & Co. ISBN: 0-8075-3058-1. 32 pp.

The book begins with a brief one page history of groundhog day. Gretchen is the next in a long line of groundhogs in her family to be The Groundhog who must come out on February 2 and either see her shadow or not. It is an awesome responsibility and Gretchen isn't sure she is up to it. The town is in an uproar until Gretchen's friend brings over a box containing written records of the town's history. Among these are the recorded experiences of Gretchen's ancestors and their experiences being The Groundhog.

This is a delightful little story and Nancy Cote's watercolor, pencil and gouache illustrations offer further detail and information.

McCain, Becky Ray. 1998. *Grandmother's dreamcatcher.* Illustrated by Stacey Schuett. Morton Grove IL: Albert Whitman & Co. ISBN: 0-8075-3031-X. 32 pp.

Kimmy goes to stay for a week with her Grandmother who is Chippewa like the rest of her family while her parents go to Chicago to house hunt as her father has a new job there. Kimmy remembers her grandmother as "... tiny and brown, with dark, shiny eyes that wrinkle in the corners when she smiles." Kimmy's grandmother, realizing Kimmy's sadness and fear at being away from her parents, takes her on a trip to the woods by the lake to make a dreamcatcher. After that, the rest of the week is spent on making surprises for her parents and their new home. The last page of the story contains directions for making a dreamcatcher. The acrylic and gouache paintings highlight the relationships between Kimmy and her grandmother.

Rodriquez, Alex with Greg Brown. 1998. *Alex Rodriquez: Hit a grand slam!* Illustrated by Doug Keith. Dallas: Taylor. 40 pp.

This is one of the best sports autobiographies or biographies available. It contains the life story of Alex Rodriquez as told from his perspective along with anecdotes about him from his family members as well as teammates and friends. The story is enhanced with both illustrations and photographs. Alex's story is inspirational as well as informative. There are other athletes available in this series such as Troy Aikman, Bonnie Blair, John Elway, Dan Marino, Scottie Pippen, Kerri Strug, Sheryl Swoopes, Kristi Yamaguchi.

Sensisi, Ellen. B. 1998. *For my family, love, Allie*. Morton Grove IL: Albert Whitman & Co. ISBN: 0-8075-2539-1. 30 pp.

Allie's family is having a big party and Allie wants to give them all something special. Allie's mother is white and her father is black. In the photographs, which accompany her story, the reader sees clearly the harmony and caring that exists not only between and among Allie and her parents, but both sides of her extended family as well. Allie decided with the help of her parents that she can make a special dessert for everyone. She makes Peanut-Butter Treats. The recipe for these and other ideas for things to give to your family are included on the last page of the story.

Spelman, Cornelia Maude. 1998. *Mama and Daddy Bear's Divorce*. Illustrated by Kathy Parkinson. Morton Grove IL: Albert Whitman & Co. ISBN: 0-8075-5221-6. 24 pp.

This is a simply told story about divorce written especially for very young children. There is a "Note to Grownups" at the beginning which explains the need for such a story. The colored pencil and watercolor illustrations set the tone and convey the range of emotions which might be felt by young children whose parents are going through a divorce. The major thrust of the story is the security and support that Dinah needs and the knowledge that "...they all loved her very much," even though the routines would now be different.

Tucker, Kathy. 1999. *The leprechaun in the basement*. Illustrated by John Sandford. Morton Grove IL: Albert Whitman & Co. ISBN: 0-8075-4450-7. 32 pp.

Times are hard for Michael McKeever's parents, and baseball season is about to begin. Michael needs new baseball shoes. One day when he is down in the basement getting something for his mother, he discovers Mr. O'Leary who has been hiding down there for some time. He also discovers Mr. O'Leary's pot of gold. Michael and Mr. O'Leary get into a shouting match. Michael calls Mr. O'Leary a "selfish leprechaun" while O'Leary calls Michael a "greedy human being." Discouraged, Michael goes to his dad who assures him that their luck will change, and he decides he will tape his old shoes for the game and make the best of it. Mr. O'Leary, in the meantime, remembers he was the best cobbler in County Cork. This is a simple story about hope. The watercolor and pencil illustrations bring the story to life and reinforce the emotional undertones of the story.